



# Evidence Paper

FROM THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS WALES DEPARTMENT

## RSPCA Cymru Response - Consultation on the Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2015

March 2015

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation regarding the Code of Guidance to Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2015.

We have been very pleased, in recent months, to have had the opportunity to discuss with Welsh Government officials the numerous areas identified in which animal welfare can be improved by building upon provisions contained within the Housing (Wales) Act. Further to this, there are issues in relation to pets which must be considered by Local Authorities and relevant organisations with regards to the allocation of accommodation and homelessness, and it is welcome such issues are referred to, in part, within the draft Code of Guidance.

It is positive the Code makes specific reference to the RSPCA's '*Housing Pets and People*' guidance, with regards to whether pets can be accommodated in certain properties and circumstances. It should be noted that the RSPCA has now produced an updated [Good Practice in Housing Guide](#), outlining some of the key considerations which providers should make with regards to animals in dwellings. Additionally, as discussed with the Welsh Government, we would also be very keen to develop further documentation specifically linked to provisions contained within the Housing (Wales) Act to help ensure the legislation realises its potential with regards to improving the welfare of animals, and would welcome the opportunity for any such relevant materials to be signposted to via this Code of Practice.

### Housing allocation and animals

Many challenges are posed by the keeping of pets in sheltered, social or council accommodation, and there are a raft of issues with regards to pets which should be considered by housing providers, including when allocating properties. When well cared for, however, companion animals often prove an asset to any community; and can have a positive impact on social cohesion and an individual's general health and wellbeing.

As noted within the Code of Guidance, many housing applicants have pets, and it is vital authorities are sensitive and understanding towards this. The RSPCA urges housing providers to implement clearly defined guidance that is flexible enough to allow pets to be kept on a case-by-case basis where the owner can meet the animal's welfare needs. It is imperative, wherever possible, that housing providers seek to ensure that responsible pet owners are not unduly penalised by allocation procedures.

Where households are placed into temporary accommodation, which may not be suitable to keep pets, it is important authorities have established links with local boarding establishments, reputable charities or other fostering options, should the tenants not be in a position to make other arrangements themselves. Indeed, such contacts will also prove key in protecting animals in cases of abandonment or where a Local Authority's must discharge their responsibilities, with regards to pets, under the National Assistance Act 1948.

The Welsh Government's assertion - that landlords "*should set out their policies in respect of pets clearly in tenancy agreements*" is welcome<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, RSPCA Cymru has long urged housing providers, including both social and private landlords, to implement Pet Policies which offers clarity to all parties, clearly outlines a tenant's legal obligations and the consequences for failing to adhere to the policy. A robust, well-enforced Pets Policy should include clear guidance on how many pets a tenant may own and any restrictions on particular species, which should depend on the suitability, style and size of the allocated accommodation in question.

All tenants, of course, also have a legal requirement to meet the welfare needs of their animals, including under the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act (2006). Such responsibilities should be made clear to tenants upon the allocation of housing, and providers could prevent the escalation of issues by doing so. The Welsh Government's relevant Codes of Practice, produced under Section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, should also be promoted, as these offer practical advice that could help tenants understand the welfare needs of their animals.

Since 2008, the RSPCA has run the [Community Animal Welfare Footprints \(CAWF\)](#) scheme, and this includes a designated award for housing. This scheme recognises Local Authorities and registered social landlords that have adopted clear and positive pet policies, useful information for tenants, clear enforcement, good partnership working, innovative education work and more. The Welsh Government's support for this scheme is much appreciated, and it is hoped it will continue to grow in Wales and promote good practice.

RSPCA Cymru, within the boundaries of our limited resources, would be happy to offer support or advice in the development of Pet Policies within the sector, and associated issues related to appropriate allocation of housing. Indeed, we intend to communicate the availability of this advice to social housing providers across Wales, and encourage issues regarding the welfare of

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<sup>1</sup> Consultation version - Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness

animals to be fully considered. If helpful, we would be happy for the Welsh Government to refer to the availability of this support within this Code of Practice.

Generally, social housing providers are often exceptionally well placed to enhance the public's understanding of animal welfare issues, and to implement schemes which encourage responsible pet ownership. Across Wales, RSPCA Cymru has worked in partnership with housing providers, and other animal welfare organisations, who have assisted with the provision of discounted, permanent identification, and the distribution of pet care advice. This, in turn, can help achieve compliance with the law, and ensure the success of particular Welsh Government policy objectives, such as the compulsory microchipping of all dogs in Wales. Proactive work in this area can be hugely beneficial for community safety, and to stop issues linked to anti-social behaviour from escalating.

Following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act, there is a legal requirement in Wales for all Local Authority's to produce a Homelessness Strategy. Many homeless people may have animals and, in many circumstances, these animals provide an important, stable, constructive relationship in their lives - and the importance of this, and procedures taking this into account, should form a tenet of Strategies. To this end, in seeking to address homelessness, authorities must be cognisant of any situations where owning a pet is proving a barrier to the taking up of places in accommodation. It is welcome that the Code of Guidance urges hostels to take animal ownership into account, and - further to this - those responsible for placing individual clients in self-contained accommodation should introduce Pet Policies.

## Conclusion

43 per cent of households in Wales own at least one animal<sup>2</sup>, and pet ownership in Wales is considerably higher than in Wales than at a UK level<sup>3</sup>. As such, animals and their welfare clearly need to be a central consideration for housing providers when addressing the allocation of accommodation. The Code of Guidance's acknowledgement of issues regarding pets is welcome, but RSPCA Cymru would welcome the opportunity to develop this information, including through the production of bespoke guidance materials linked to provisions contained within the Housing (Wales) Act, including - with regards to this consultation - issues which Local Authorities and registered social landlords should include in Pet Policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government's National Survey for Wales, 2009/2010, Chapter 12 – Pet Ownership

<sup>3</sup> Pet Food Manufacturers' Association – Regional Pet Population Survey